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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 LIMA 003983

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

PASS TO INL FOR J FARRAR; ONDCP FOR D GETTINGS; DEPT FOR
CNC; NSC FOR C BARTON; WHA FOR MONSERRATE

E.O. 12958:N/A

TAGS: SNAR PE KPRP

SUBJECT: Eradication and Interdiction Program Status -
September 2005

Summary

11. (SBU) With a backdrop of increased coca hectarage and cocaine production in Peru, NAS is facing challenges to step up eradication levels in a more conflictive environment. There have been two distinct phases in eradication and interdiction efforts this year. From January until the end of May, active cocalero opposition held progress in the field to low numbers of hectares eradicated. However, since May, several changes, particularly the infusion of trained and motivated DIRANDRO recruits and unified operational control have discouraged active opposition and have led to a nearly five-fold increase in hectares eradicated and increased interdiction of drugs, coca leaf and chemicals. End Summary.

Eradication January to May

12. (SBU) For the first five months of the year, when confronted by rock-slinging cocaleros using quasi-military tactics around eradication sites, the police backed off causing a halt in operations. During this period, the PNP were unprepared for violence, including the Sendero Luminoso ambush on April 19 that damaged NAS helicopters, and other rock-throwing attacks on the last unprotected helicopter extracting the police from an eradication site. The damage to 5 helicopters delayed operations and called for a review of our security procedures. The resulting eradication for these months was an average of only 248.63 hectares eradicated per month.

Eradication May to the Present

13. (SBU) A second more productive phase was triggered by the graduation of 200 police cadets from the NAS-sponsored Training Academies in May. As per NAS guidance, all the new police were assigned to one Special Operations Unit that focused on support for eradication efforts, destruction of cocaine laboratories and vehicle search operations. This critical mass under a unified command now had the training and motivation to confront and disperse mobs and make arrests, allowing eradicators to stay in the field overnight. Currently, approximately 300 police provide 24/7 protection to 500 eradicators and the supporting helicopter assets. Another major improvement has been the consolidation of all helicopters/operations under one police colonel, allowing for more coordinated and efficient use of aviation assets both for eradication and interdiction. This has allowed the PNP to work on as many as five fronts simultaneously. As a result, the average of hectares per month has risen to 1191.82, an increase of 479%.

Interdiction

14. (SBU) Interdiction efforts are taking place on two fronts. In both the VRAE and Upper Huallaga/Monzon Valleys, police have been staging interdiction operations that have resulted in the destruction of more than 300 base cocaine laboratories and ton quantities of essential chemicals with an estimated value of nearly 2 million dollars, keeping an estimated 4 tons of cocaine off the market. In the VRAE, a Mobile Road Interdiction Group has been using a gamma-ray machine that identifies chemicals used in processing coca leaf into cocaine base. To date the Group has intercepted 150 kilos of chemicals and several vehicles, but, more significantly, their presence on a major drug highway has caused disruption and a major fluctuation in prices. As a result of these efforts, the cost of the chemicals has doubled while the price of coca leaves has dropped by half. Drug traffickers have been forced to transport chemicals via mules on back roads and via rivers.

15. (SBU) A further example of the more dangerous security environment occurred August 27 when a DIRANDRO based Special Operations Unit was destroying a cocaine lab, with our

helicopter support, near the NAS-constructed base at Palma Pampa in the VRAE. Police received fire from automatic weapons, requiring them to shoot back. The attackers retreated and no injuries were reported. Police resolve has not been affected.

Upcoming Challenges

16. (SBU) Counter-narcotics operations will, by necessity, take place in areas where we anticipate resistance. In late September, the eradication operations will move to San Gaban, where last year's unexpected resistance hobbled operations. We understand that the local population is aware that CORAH is coming and are somewhat resigned to the eradication. The police will use the strategy developed after the difficult operation in San Gaban last year: soften the areas through interdiction efforts, expose the illegality of cocalero activities through media coverage, enter with large numbers, and sweep areas of operation (including with bomb squads and canines) before CORAH begins to eradicate. Police will camp in the field to provide full security for people and helicopters. Although the 2006 plans are yet to be decided, hard-core coca growers in areas where Sendero Luminoso columns are known to operate will be the next targets. It is likely that the very hostile Monzon valley will be on the list with its nearly 13,000 hectares of coca. As more cadets graduate in the coming year, dedicated to counter-narcotics operations East of the Andes, we anticipate NAS's relations with the police will continue to improve as will police capabilities. By 2008 we expect 2,000 new police will be operating in areas previously devoid of law enforcement - for the first time in memory, willing to stand up to threatened cocalero violence and attacks from subversive groups.

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